

MIRRABOOKA WATER TREATMENT PLANT

Grievance

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [9.35 am]: I refer to comments made by the member for Ocean Reef; I appreciate that the new unit of measurement will be the “Sandilands”. As a Dockers supporter, I think that is an excellent unit of measurement.

Mr T.R. Buswell: He’s in a moon boot.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Size 18.

My grievance is to the Minister for Water and it relates to the Mirrabooka water treatment plant. I raised this matter last year. I have not said it yet in this place, so I put on the record that I appreciate the previous Minister for Water’s approach to the issues I raised with him. He took those issues very seriously. Although I may not have agreed with some of the minister’s general policy stances, I appreciated the fact that he took the issues I brought to him seriously and worked constructively to help the residents of my electorate.

I raised this issue last year, and at that time the former minister said he would look at it. This issue relates to the buffer zone around the Mirrabooka water treatment plant. As I said last year, there is a 200 metre buffer around the Mirrabooka water treatment plant. That buffer impacts on a significant portion of land on Alexander Drive in the Paradise Quay area. That portion of land on Alexander Drive has been designated as a site for an aged-care facility. One issue confronting both the proponents and the City of Swan is that the buffer significantly reduces the size of that proposed aged-care facility. As members know, the issue of aged-care facilities is very important. We all see a growing need in our communities for high quality aged-care facilities in the suburbs, especially where people have lived over the past decade or 20 years; people want to remain in that community if possible because they have a network of friends and they know the area.

This site is a very good site because it is close to the shops and is on a main transport corridor—that is, Alexander Drive. Frankly, the site has been set aside and considered for an aged-care facility since 2002. A lot of progress was made last year when the City of Swan purchased that land from the state government at a discounted price. We had some great progress. The biggest issue that now confronts the facility is the water treatment plant buffer. There was some correspondence between the Water Corporation and the City of Swan in April last year, which I talked about in my grievance in June last year. The correspondence basically said that the Water Corporation could reduce the buffer if a couple of things happened first: either the water treatment plant was moved or the type of chlorine used was changed. As I understand it, the type of chlorine used stops people from being able to live within that buffer. There can be parks and recreation within that buffer, but people cannot live there, which impacts on the plans for an aged-care facility.

The proposed cost would be between \$750 000 and \$1 million, which is a significant amount of money, but that money would free up that land and allow hundreds of older people to be housed. In my opinion, the benefit would far outweigh the cost. Considering the issue of housing affordability across the metropolitan area, this would be a low-cost option that would allow a lot of people to be housed. As I said in my previous grievance, there are 3 000 people in Ballajura aged 55 years and over, and many of them want to remain in that community. This land could be freed up at a minimal cost. The City of Swan has been trying to negotiate other options, one of which is to get some land cleared across the road, but this buffer seems to be the biggest issue preventing the development of this appropriately sized land.

I have looked at some of the other priorities that have been funded in the budget. The Water Corporation has been allocated \$8.9 million from the consolidated fund for the relocation of some pipes and underground drainage works for the Perth Waterfront project, which is fine. The Water Corporation is doing that because it needs to relocate those pipes to allow the waterfront project to continue. I would argue that suburban aged-care facilities are as equally important as that project. Again, we need more aged-care beds and we need people to be able to spend their retirement years in their local community.

Another priority in the 2011–12 budget is the super town concept, the planning of which has been allocated \$85 million. That seems to be a lot of money to spend in one year on the planning of super towns. I am not sure whether that will be spent in one year; I think that is a bit optimistic. Also, \$140 million has been set aside in the Western Australian Land Authority budget for projects such as the revitalisation of Claremont north, which is an urban renewal project. All those things might be valid, but I cannot see how the expenditure of \$1 million to free up this land would not be a priority. As I said, we should consider the cost–benefit of this, and that the cost of developing new land all throughout the area, whether to the north, south or east, is enormous. This is existing land; all that would need to be done would be to reduce the buffer to make it work. I believe that, given the current circumstances, it is wasteful to have that bit of land, located so close to the city on a main transport network, basically not able to be used for this purpose. When I asked the minister in April whether he was considering the proposal to relocate the buffer or change the chlorine used in the facility, his one-word answer

was no. I asked him to reconsider that and consider providing funding and ask the Water Corporation to change the chlorine it uses.

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Water) [9.42 am]: I thank the member for West Swan for once again raising this issue, on which I have done a fair bit of research; this was a grievance raised last year. I do not disagree with much of what the member has said. I have some experience in aged care, and this would be a very good location for an aged-care facility. As the member said, it is close to shops and transport corridors and is in a park setting, so it is quite a good location. Its one problem is that there is a buffer there, and buffers are there for a reason. The water treatment plant has been there for 25 years, I understand—I have not visited this one—and it would have had a buffer put around it to protect Western Australia's important water asset. The Minister for Planning is not in this place, but I think that is a very important measure in the Western Australian planning system. Buffers are extremely important and essential. I understand that over the past 15 years the Water Corporation has worked on this buffer and reduced it to 200 metres from the chlorine treatment plant, which is a statutory requirement for the treatment of water. The chlorine is stored as a liquid, but it vaporises as it goes through the water purification process. We need to make sure that people are not close to chlorine gas because it can be dangerous.

The question comes down to quite a simple issue. One solution, as the member mentioned, is to relocate the chlorine storage facility a little to the west—obviously, the 200-metre buffer will remain—so that the buffer will be further away from where the City of Swan is proposing to put an aged-care facility. The other solution, as the member mentioned, is to change to a different type of chlorine such as sodium hypochlorite, which does not vaporise. I am not familiar with that process; I am familiar with the other process. I have been advised that if that were to be done, there would be no need for a buffer. That would be quite a good economic situation in an area where there may be a lot of residents, because that might increase enormously—by some tens of millions of dollars in fact—the value of the land around the facility. The member probably knows the area better than I do, but looking at the plan, no development has happened, fortuitously, inside the buffer; there have been instances, unfortunately, such as with Cockburn Cement, of some development being done inside the buffer, but in this case the buffer has worked.

Of the two solutions suggested by the Water Corporation, the most expensive is to use a different type of chlorination process. It has been worked out that that would cost about \$700 000, so to amortise that and allow business to continue as usual, it would need \$6 million or \$7 million to run that process forever and a day. The cheapest solution would be to relocate the chlorination facility on site so that the buffer would move. I have an old figure for that of \$1.2 million; the member mentioned that it would cost between \$750 000 and \$1 million. Regardless of what the figure is, the question gets down to: who pays? I agree with the member that aged care facilities are important and that we do not provide enough. I actually have a personal view that the metropolitan regional scheme should allocate land to be used for future aged care facilities. I have a particular problem in my electorate of Nedlands, which has a quite high-age demographic of people who are getting to the stage of having to go into a nursing home and not able to stay in Nedlands but having to go to Gosnells or somewhere to find a place. I appreciate that the member is saying there is not even an aged-care facility in her area, and that this is an opportunity for aged care to be provided on that site.

In my experience of the economics of aged-care facilities, land is not really the issue. I have been involved in trying to source land for aged care around the western suburbs—I was not successful—and the aged-care providers were prepared to pay \$20 million for land at Lake View, or whatever it was called.

Several members interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I do not believe that a price of \$1.2 million in an overall net present value analysis for land for an aged-care facility is a very high price to pay. In fact, if the City of Swan wanted to make some money out of that land, I think it would get a nice return if it paid the \$1.2 million and leased the land to an aged-care provider. If it chose to go down another route, the aged-care provider would easily find \$1.2 million to get that extra bit of land. I believe there is a solution but the question is: who pays? Why should the Water Corporation pay?

The member mentioned the waterfront development. The Water Corporation will not move the pipe at the waterfront development. The proponents of the waterfront development have to pay the Water Corporation to change that pipe.